



WFTDA Recommendations for Return to Full-Contact Skating

These guidelines are meant as recommendations and not regulations for leagues and individuals, and focus on gradually coming back to full contact. Please note the timeline for return to play will be situation-dependent.

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I. Recommendations for Return to (Full Contact) Skating After a Break

1. **The rationale for these recommendations is to focus on injury prevention by easing into contact and building up intensity in drills.**
 - a. Please note that participants competing in WFTDA-sanctioned games and WFTDA insurance holders must comply with the minimum standards and recommendations found in the [WFTDA Risk Management Guidelines](#). These guidelines have been developed in order to increase awareness and help members reduce the risks to individuals and organizations from damages and unexpected injuries in the sport of roller derby.
2. **The WFTDA does not require leagues to test [Minimum Skill Requirements \(MSRs\)](#) when coming back from a break - testing frequency and application is up to the member league's policy.**

We do however recommend leagues to have a clearance for scrimmage procedure or the following policies in place for:

- a. Injured skaters returning to training
- b. Skaters coming back from a leave of absence
- c. League activity returning to training after your offseason
- d. Possible team activity returning to training after a break (e.g. your chartered skater might have different timelines than your new- or intermediate skaters)

- e. Officials being included in strength, skating fundamentals and endurance practices in your return to practice plan (stages 1-4 or 1-5 below)

3. The WFTDA wants to prevent leagues from rushing into games and tournaments when first starting back with practice.

- a. We recommend completing the graduated return to (contact) skating practice protocol before getting back to sanctioned or competitive play against other teams.
- b. Plan time for your Officials to come back to practice and scrimmage as well, including focuses for low contact level drills (e.g. 4.2 Game Structure Penalties) and full contact level drills (e.g. 4.1 Contact Penalties).
- c. Make sure you are ready for competitive gameplay (especially tournaments with multiple games over several days) and take pressure off your skaters by not scheduling too many games or tournaments in the beginning of your season or come-back.
- d. Time to practice together will help from a wellness perspective and may also contribute to improved team performance.

II. Graduated Return to (Contact) Skating Practice Protocol Following an Off-Skates Period

Please note actual timelines and starting points always depend on how long the off-skates period is, the reason for it (injury-related return is different than coming back from the offseason and a forced mid-season break, etc.) and what is being focused on in the meantime. We generally recommend building strength and endurance when being off skates for several months.

	Stage	Functional exercise(s)	Objective
1	No activity	Rest	Recovery
2	Light aerobic exercises	Yoga, Stretching, Walking	Mobility and light movement
3	Cardio exercises	Running, swimming, cycling with graduating intensity	Increase heart rate and endurance
4	Strength	Push, Pull, Hinge, Squat/Lunge, Carry <i>Important areas to focus on: Quads, Glutes, Core, Back, Neck & Shoulders</i>	Build strength and stability throughout the body's range of motion for injury prevention and strengthening with these foundational body movement patterns.
5	Skating and non-contact	Non-contact skating drills, endurance skating, speed skating, balance & agility	Basic and advanced skating skills (incl. long warm-up, stretching and mobility). No intentional contact.
6	Low contact training drills	Progression to more complex but controlled training drills, still non-forceful contact and no face-to-face blocking	Building up intensity by reducing forceful contact and contact initiation with speed (e.g. lean blocking vs. hitting).
7	Full contact training and scrimmage drills	Full contact drills with peers and controlled scrimmage scenarios	Includes full speed initiation and all contact considered legal, but with breaks and different levels to scale up the scenarios and intensity.
8	Scrimmage	Normal gameplay	Fully return to play in scrimmages and game-based scenarios.

III. Mental Health Recommendations

According to numerous studies¹, psychosocial factors significantly influence vulnerability and resiliency to sport and exercise injuries.

In order to minimize the negative impact as a result of these factors, the following recommendations are provided in relation to absence from and return to play.

Open atmosphere and communication

Unclear communication and expectations can result in unnecessary stress. Additionally, the athlete needs to feel trust to honestly and openly disclose relevant information regarding their current situation, in order for appropriate adjustments to be made by the league and its leadership. An overview of league and team culture, as well as clear communication policies may prove helpful to improve openness and trust.

Continuous involvement and connectedness

Athletes are often accustomed to routines and frequent contact with their peers. In situations when this is not possible, a lack of purpose and disconnectedness may occur. Athletes may respond to this with a decrease in positive activities potentially resulting in depressive symptoms or feelings of emptiness or meaninglessness. Alternatively, athletes may cope by increasing compensatory activities risking further injuries and burnout. Supporting athletes with the support to review goals and engage in social activities may give athletes a continued feeling of purpose, accountability, and connectedness. Adjusted goals may refer to mental and physical development or recovery.

Flexible approaches and compassion

Each athlete's situation is different, which makes it crucial for leagues and management to engage in their safe return-to-play without restricting them into a one-size-fits-all model or structure. Check in with the athletes and provide spaces for them to plan and structure the activities or recovery in collaboration with leadership or peers. Unique and out of the ordinary situations call for an increased need for self-compassion and compassion for others, which regards both athletes and leadership.

¹ Please see this fairly recent meta study of 48 published studies for more information: [Psychosocial Factors and Sport Injuries: Meta-analyses for Prediction and Prevention](#).